

ROMANS (15:14)

Competent Christians

PART 90 – DECEMBER 3, 2006

COMPLIMENT CONTROVERSY

We begin with a little controversy: in today's verse, Paul *compliments* the Roman believers ... yet he has never been to Rome. This has led some scholars to argue that Paul is softening his rebukes with strategic and harmlessly insincere flattery.

Let's read it together, and see what you think:

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. - *Romans 15:14 NIV*

There're two reasons I believe that Paul is very sincere:

1. The phrase "I myself" is an unnecessary Greek redundancy; it's an emphasis, like: "I really-really mean this."
2. In chapter sixteen, Paul sends a special greeting to:
 - Priscilla and Aquila (my fellow workers in Christ).
 - And Andronicus and Junias (who've been in prison with me).
 - And my dear friend Epenetus (an early convert in Asia).
 - And Urbanus (our fellow worker in Christ).
 - And Rufus (chosen in the Lord).
 - And his mother (who has been a mother to me, too).
 - And Mary (who worked very hard for you).
 - And Phoebe (a servant of the church).
 - And Apelles (tested and approved in Christ).
 - And Ampliatus and Stachys and Aristobulus and Herodion and Narcissus and Tryphena and Tryphosa and Persis and Asyncritus and Phlegon and Hermes and Patrobas and Hermas and Philologus and Julia and Nereus and Olympas.

If Paul somehow *hasn't* had a first hand report, he can easily conclude by the caliber of their leaders - his own good friends and fellow workers - that this group of Roman believers:

- A. Are full of righteousness and integrity: "Full of goodness"
- B. Have a good grasp on Christian doctrine: "Complete in knowledge"
- C. Know how to equip and assist each other: "Competent to instruct"

FULL OF GOODNESS

- Paul isn't speculating here ... he's: "convinced"

Paul can be blunt and corrective in this letter, not because they *lack* these qualities, but because they *possess* them!

Now, let's look at Paul's three compliments to see if *we* deserve 'em:

"That you yourselves are full of goodness"

Q: What does it mean to be full of: "goodness"?

When Jesus was speaking to the rich young ruler, He said:

Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. - *Matthew 19:17*

Only God is *good*, so to be filled with *goodness* is to be filled with God-like qualities, attributes, and character traits. Something is good to the degree that it's like God.

When Paul says, "full" of goodness, he's referring to the "full-range" of areas in our lives that can be renewed and restored: our desires our motives our thinking our conduct and choices. Christianity is a call to radical transformation.

This is how our "goodness" reveals the *power* of God to others.

Q: Have you seen the ad with TWO MEN and a huge hornet's nest?



One is balancing on top of a wobbly step ladder with clippers; the other is holding an open garbage can. The one says, "When it drops, make sure you get that lid on fast." The other says, "I'm on it!" The ladder kicks out, the man hugs the nest and falls onto the garbage can, and the other guy runs straight into a barbecue.

Q: I love that ad ... but can anyone tell me what it's advertising?

A: United Healthcare.

Q: Have you ever told someone about an ad you saw, and then they ask you what it was advertising ... and you don't have any idea?

Q: What good did that ad really do?

Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. - *Matthew 5:14-16 NIV*

My goodness should advertise God. In most cases our lives are either going to be an advertisement for the Gospel or a public statement that it doesn't work!

This doesn't mean that every time I do a good deed I say, "Don't thank *me*; praise my Father in Heaven!" Trust me, this doesn't bring God the glory he deserves! It means that I have no ulterior motive or hidden agenda. I just want three simple things:

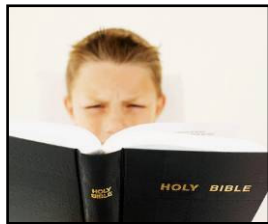
- A. To become like the One who is my supreme treasure.
- B. To please the One whose judgment matters the most.
- C. To reflect the One who shares His love through me.

This is what it means to be: "full of goodness"

COMPLETE IN KNOWLEDGE

And Paul's second compliment is that they are:

"Complete in knowledge"



The word "complete" here doesn't mean that these Romans have nothing more to learn. It means that they're "mature" in truth. They have been diligent students of doctrine. It takes effort to understand and apply the Bible. Grace prohibits us from *earning* God's favor, but *not* from working to comprehend and appreciate Him more. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort.

And "complete" suggests more than just gathering information. Apollos is a well-educated, zealous Jewish-Christian missionary, who is mentioned in the books of Acts, 1 Corinthians, and Titus.

[Apollos was] an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures ... though he knew only the baptism of John. - *Acts 18:24-25 NKJ*

But when he combined this with the purpose of the cross and the pouring out of the Spirit, his knowledge was "completed".

[Apollos] vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. - *Acts 18:28 NKJ*

Q: Who do you suppose helped Apollos "complete" his knowledge?

When Aquila and Priscilla heard [Apollos], they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. - *Acts 18:26 NKJ*

The *same* Priscilla and Aquila that Paul greets in Romans 16:3! Paul could say their knowledge was *complete* because he knew it contained the truth of God's Word and the power of God's Spirit.

COMPETENT TO INSTRUCT

So, Paul says they're full of goodness, complete in knowledge ...

"And competent to instruct one another"

It's not enough to be full of goodness and knowledge; we must care for the spiritual wellbeing of those around us.

The word "instruct" here can mean counsel, advise, encourage, guide, assist, direct, warn, caution, reprove, and rebuke. It means loving someone enough to tell them the truth when their faith is at stake, even if it's uncomfortable. That can be kind of scary ... especially if you're not angry!

When we're mad it's easy to be honest, but hard to be kind!

Q: Have you ever spoken to someone who had spinach in their teeth, and you didn't have the nerve to tell them?



There's just that fear of embarrassment. Yet, we tell our *friends* when they have spinach in *their* teeth. What's the difference - what drives out the fear? Love. (1 John 4:18)

- We speak truthfully when love outweighs fear.

Love calls attention to the spinach. Love approached Apollos, took him aside, and explained the way of God more accurately. Our concern for the spiritual welfare of those God has placed around us must override our fear of discomfort (for ourselves).

The one who fears is not made perfect in love. - 1 John 4:18b NIV

We don't need more courage, we need more love.

[Jesus said] A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you ... - John 13:34 NIV

Before I am able to love others courageously and graciously, I must deeply appreciate how God loves me. Then I will desire to love as I have been loved.

There is no fear in love ... - 1 John 4:18a NIV